



## State of Wisconsin \ DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Jim Doyle, Governor  
Matthew J. Frank, Secretary

101 S. Webster St.  
Box 7921  
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7921  
Telephone 608-266-2621  
FAX 608-267-3579  
TTY Access via relay - 711

December 4, 2009

Christine Thomas, Chair  
Natural Resources Board

Dear Chair Thomas and Natural Resource Board Members,

The Department has decided to remove the 16-day deer season proposal as an agenda item at the Natural Resources Board meeting next week. Given the preliminary harvest numbers for the 2009 nine-day hunt that the Department released earlier this week, we believe it is appropriate to postpone consideration of alternative herd control measures.

As we make important decisions about the best mix of policies to control the deer herd where it is over population goals and recover the herd where it is under population goals, I would like to give our staff more time to gather all the data from this season's hunt and analyze it. This data is a critical component in the population models we use to estimate the size of the herd both regionally and statewide.

While we believe that a 16-day season remains a viable option for future consideration, removing this item from the Board's December agenda makes it likely that there will not be sufficient time to implement it for the 2010 deer hunting season. The extra time we take now to carefully review this season's deer harvest will be time well spent and will provide a better foundation for future herd management decision for the 2010 season and beyond.

Our 2009 pre-season forecasts anticipated a lower harvest. Preliminary harvest numbers from the just-completed nine-day gun hunt indicate a significant drop in harvest on the heels of 2008's decline. We know that the herd is smaller in some areas, which is why we took action for the 2009 season. During this season, 13 deer management units had no bonus antlerless permits in order to restore the herd in those areas. 38 units were moved out of herd control to regular season, and we moved 29 units out of Earn-a-Buck, which contributed to a substantial decline in antlerless harvest. In all, the number of regular units increased from 21 in 2008 to 59 in 2009.

We will look carefully at the data to determine where we now stand with respect to the size of the deer population, which varies by region across the state. Preliminary numbers show a decline in buck harvest across the state. Hunters have reported seeing fewer deer on the landscape, and in some areas, a significant decline. For example, in the north and northeast, there are significant areas where the deer population is below goal. On the other hand, in the CWD zone in the southern part of the state, over-population has been a contributing factor to the increased prevalence of CWD in the deer herd, increasing the risk of spread. A full analysis of the 2009 harvest data will give us a better understanding of the size of the deer population as we make decisions for the 2010 hunt and future seasons.

At the Board's meeting next week we still intend to present our regular report on the fall deer hunt, which will include preliminary harvest numbers, what hunters have been reporting and seeing, license sales, enforcement issues and other areas that we usually cover.

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The 16-day proposal was developed from a process launched last April in response to widespread hunter concerns about earn-a-buck. The Board created a stakeholder committee that included strong representation from hunting organizations to consider effective alternatives to earn-a-buck. The Department went out for public comment this fall. We sincerely appreciate the hard work from staff and hunting organizations as well as widespread comment we received from hunters and the public.

The Department will continue to strive for the best deer hunting in the nation with a healthy, sustainable deer herd in balance with its habitat, including keeping crop and forest damage attributable to deer browsing at tolerable levels. We look forward to working with the Board, the Legislature, hunters, farmers, forest owners and the public over the months to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt Frank", is positioned above the typed name.

Matt Frank  
Secretary